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# Bandon Western WORLD

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Business



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Photos by Steve McCasland

## Bore site

Two holes are being bored 40 feet under the Coquille River by Michels Directional Crossings of Wisconsin from this spot in the Ni-les'tun Unit of the Bandon Marsh National Wildlife Refuge.

# Massive marsh project

## Work to restore wildlife refuge turns back a century

By Steve McCasland  
Staff Writer

Work has begun on the largest tidal marsh restoration project ever undertaken in Oregon.

The 418-acre project in the Bandon Marsh National Wildlife Refuge involves restoring former tidelands that ranchers diked and drained 100 years ago. It's taking place in the refuge's Ni-les'tun Unit.

"It's interesting that a hundred years or more ago, ranchers used the technology of the time — horses, wagons and hand tools — to change this entire landscape," said Dave Ledig, South Coast manager for the Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuge System. "And now we're using modern tools — excavators and other heavy equipment — to return it to its natural state."

The work involves three main construction projects this summer: preparing the former pasture area for twice-daily flooding by the tides; burying electrical lines; and raising North Bank Lane so it isn't affected by tides.

### Pasture no more

Livestock are gone from the property now, and heavy-equipment operators are busy helping nature reassert itself. By mid-September, Knife River Corp. will have dug miles of artificial



## Heavy equipment

Bandon's Bryce Smith prepares to operate an excavator at the tidal marsh restoration project on North Bank Lane last week.

tidal channels. Large woody material will be placed in the channels to create salmon habitat in the future tidal marsh.

Fahy's Creek and Redd Creek were diverted into ditches many years ago. Knife River will recontour both streambeds so they meander more like natural streams, resulting in improved wildlife habitat.

By about mid-September, the contractor will remove the artificial dikes that surround the refuge, along with three tidegates that helped transform the salt marsh into pasture. Daily tides will flow onto the property for the first time in more than a century.

### Utilities

Coos-Curry Electric Co-op's 25,000-volt power line that crosses the refuge is being put underground by Michels Directional Crossings of Wisconsin.

"Concurrent to Knife River's work, we have to ensure that the community infrastructure is taken care of," said Roy Lowe, manager of the Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuge System. Underground power lines will be safe and maintenance-free, he said.

Two trenches will be dug across the former pasture, and two holes are being bored 40 feet below the river. Conduit will be installed in both, followed by dual 3,500-foot custom-made electrical cables.

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# Marsh

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Michels' crew, which started on June 28, also is responsible for installing concrete electrical vaults on each side of the river to serve the system. Once the system is assembled, tested and energized, the crew will finish up by removing the existing overhead wire, poles and towers.

Michels' portion of the Ni-les'tun Unit project should be done around mid-August. The electrical work is being paid for with \$2.5 million in America Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds.

## Road work

Once the tides inundate the pasture, the water will approach North Bank Lane twice daily at Fahy's Creek and Redd Creek. The road is low in those spots and floods during heavy rain. To avoid potential daily flooding and damage to the roadway in those areas, \$4.5 million in federal money will be used to improve the road.

"We plan to raise those two sections of the road

this summer and install large fish-friendly culverts under them," Ledig said. "Next year, after the raised roadbeds have had time to settle, we'll improve North Bank Lane from U.S. Highway 101 to Randolph Road, along with the intersections at Highway 101 and Fahy's Road."

Tidewater Contractors Inc. of Brookings will do the work, along with replacing a culvert near the viewpoint parking area with a pedestrian passage.

"The new 8-foot passage will allow people to access a planned trail system on the north side of the road," Lowe said.

The road improvement project will include stormwater and erosion control to protect wetlands and fish habitat. The road width also will increase to 24 feet.

The road will be closed twice this summer for culvert work, lasting about a week this month and about two weeks in mid- to late-August.

Coos County will be responsible for maintaining North Bank Lane, a county road, after the work is completed next year.

## Economic impact

Ledig said that the approximately \$9 million project is creating jobs.

"This is bringing lots of dollars into the local economy, as well as providing the long-term benefits of wildlife habitat in the area," he said.

Lowe added: "It's a huge project that's going at lightning speed compared to other projects we've worked on in Oregon. The activity level will be raising significantly in July and August."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working on a comprehensive management plan for the Bandon Marsh NWR and will need public input to complete it.

"We'll have public meetings before completing the plan next year," Lowe said.

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